

Glossary of General Terms from Hegel

(Note: all regularly capitalized terms that one sees in a translation of Hegel's philosophy are the result of the translator's choice, not Hegel's. In German all nouns are capitalized, so one cannot use capitalization to add emphasis. Hegel does use bold or italics, however, when he wants to add emphasis. Translators usually reproduce these faithfully.)

absolute (das Absolut) – that which encompasses everything, including its failure to encompass everything. Hegel believes that our perspective is always implicitly absolute: we necessarily apprehend the world as a whole whenever we apprehend it. The point of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to recognize this absolute perspective as our own. When we reach absolute knowing, we recognize the contradictory identity of identity and difference. At this point, we reconcile ourselves with the necessity of contradiction. Absolute knowing is reconciling oneself with the intractability of contradiction.

abstract (abstrakt) – not precise or specific, the opposite of **concrete**. Our first attempts to know are abstract (because they know using vague terms such as “this” and “here”), and they become increasingly concrete as the dialectic advances and our conceptual apparatus develops. Absolute knowing is the least abstract form of knowing, whereas sense certainty (the first moment of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) is the most.

actual / actuality (wirklich / die Wirklichkeit) – what exists as the realization of the concept, as opposed to what is posed as essential by thinking. Actuality is thus originally distinct from **essence**, though we come to see their identity. Hegel distinguishes between actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), which is the realized concept, and reality (*Realität*), which is just what is.

appearance (das Schein / die Erscheinung) – Hegel distinguishes between two forms of appearance—Schein and Erscheinung, sometimes translated as “shine” and “appearance” but better translated as “semblance” and “appearance.” Semblance is more abstract than appearance. It is an illusion that obscures a being. In contrast, appearance correlates to an essence that we apprehend only through the appearance.

certainty (die Gewissheit) – what the subject knows to be the case for itself, in contrast to **truth**, which is what is the case regardless of the subject's own knowledge. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* begins with “Sense Certainty,” which is the certainty that the subject deriving from only its own sense experience. But this sense experience has almost no truth to it at all. This narrow certainty becomes increasing broad as it comes closer to truth through the course of the book. The trajectory of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* brings about a step-by-step reconciliation of certainty with truth, so that in the end they coincide and the subject is certain of the truth.

concept (der Begriff) – a form which guides the act of knowing and allows us to make sense of the world around us. The concept brings together identity and difference and enables us to see how they relate to each other. According to Hegel, all knowledge of the world, even sensory

data, depends on the mediation of the concept. Causality is a concept, and it allows me to understand the relationship between the dent in the side of my car and the car which is now speeding away from the scene of the accident. For Hegel, the concept includes its actualization, so that we cannot distinguish concept from actuality. In contrast, bare reality has not yet been conceptualized. The concept is misleadingly translated as “the Notion” by A. V. Miller. This gives it a mystical significance that is utterly distant from Hegel’s thought.

concrete (konkret) – what is known fully without any presumptions left unexplored. Concrete knowledge is what we arrive at after beginning with abstraction. The more mediation that we include in our knowledge of something, the more concrete our knowledge becomes. For Hegel, the concrete is not what is most **immediate** but what is most **mediated**, in contrast to most other thinkers. The path through the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a path from abstraction to concreteness. See **abstract**.

consciousness (das Bewusstsein) -- the agency which knows things without taking itself into consideration, as opposed to **self-consciousness**, which relates to itself as a consciousness.

content (der Inhalt) -- the material that fills in particular **forms**. Common sense takes content as more important than form, but Hegel believes that form determines content. In this sense, he is a formalist thinker. See **form**.

contingent (kontingent) – something which could happen or not happen, as opposed to what is **necessary**, which is what must happen. A contingent event is both possible and actual. It happens by chance, without being governed by a concept, rule, or law. For example, for a football player, the color of his hair is something contingent: nothing about being a football player demands a certain hair color. But for this same football player weight would be something necessary. A person who weighs 95 pounds can’t play football, so a certain weight necessarily follows from the identity of the football player.

contradiction (die Widersprechung) – the driving force of all thought and being. The endpoint of Hegel’s philosophy is the discovery that contradiction animates both thought and being itself. We arrive at the **absolute** when we reconcile ourselves with the intractability of contradiction and recognize that we cannot overcome it and that no other form of knowledge or society can overcome it.

dialectic (dialektik) – Hegel’s method. The interdependence of things on their opposites and on the **totality**, which reveals the contradictions that drive thought and actions forward. Dialectic seeks to sustain contradiction and moves from contradictions that are easier to resolve to those that are increasingly difficult, until it finally arrives at the idea that contradiction cannot ultimately be resolved. By moving through contradiction, dialectical thought uncovers the connections that exist between things, despite their seeming isolation, until it thinks the whole. Thinking the whole is, for Hegel, equal to thinking the impossibility of overcoming contradiction.

essence (das Wesen) – what thought takes as the most important element. The one property of a

thing that defines the thing. We discover the essence of a thing not by looking beneath the appearance but by looking through the appearance. We might say that the essence is the appearance of the appearance. For Hegel, essence only exists in relation to other essences. The “Doctrine of Essence” is the second major section of the *Science of Logic*, between the “Doctrine of Being” and the “Doctrine of the Concept.”

determinate (bestimmte) – what doesn’t lead to a dead end but instead produces a new result. A determinate negation (bestimmte Negation) creates a positive result that advances the dialectic.

false (das Falsch) -- the false is not something which can be maintained separate from the true, but it is integral to the true, and thus the false is nothing **in-itself**. The false is part of a path to the true, and so once we arrive at the true, we recognize that the false wasn't really false. Hence, the false is a disappearing **moment**. The same is true for evil. Neither evil nor the false exist as such for Hegel, but by the same token, we cannot have truth without beginning in the false.

finite / finitude (endlich / die Endlichkeit) – that which is subjected to external restriction. Plants and animals are purely finite beings because their deaths comes from outside, whereas humans are also **infinite** in addition to being finite because they can think about and even bring about their own deaths.

for-consciousness (für Bewusstsein) – something which has been reflected upon by consciousness and which consciousness knows as its own.

for-itself (für-sich) -- something which reflects upon itself and becomes conscious of its own role in producing itself.

form (die Form) – a structure that plays a **determinate** role relative to its **content**, which it contains. Form always exists in relation to content. The form of an office building would be the edifice itself; its content would be the different companies it houses. The form of a movie would be the way it looks, while the content would be the storyline. *Memento* is a movie which is experimental in terms of its form. We tend to think of what is formal as less important than content, but Hegel reverses this valuation. In the same way, the form of the film *Memento*—the fact that it narrates the story in reverse chronology—holds the key to understanding the content—a mystery about who killed the hero’s wife. Form is akin, in some sense, to **subject**. Both provide the framework through which content or substance has its existence. Hegel sees both **form** and **subject** as more important than any previous philosophers.

idea (die Idee) – in contrast to our usual way of thinking, the idea is not just a mere idea for Hegel. The idea always includes its actualization. What remains just a mere idea does not have the status of an idea for him. The idea brings together the concept and the object. When we arrive at the absolute idea, the distance between the concept and the object disappears.

identity (die Identität) – Hegel always sees identity as including both identity and difference. If identity didn’t include some difference, we would never be able to say that the two things that are identical are two separate things. Two copies of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* are identical, and

yet they are also different things. Unless they were different in some way, we wouldn't call them "identical." We discover the identity of something only by finding out what it isn't. In this sense, identity depends on the affirmation of difference, not on the negation of it. His most important statement about identity is that "identity is the identity of identity and difference." With this statement, he tries to avow the role that difference has in all identity, which is why almost all analytic philosophers see Hegel as a charlatan.

immediate (unmittelbar) – something experienced directly, without any **mediation** at all. Related to the **abstract**. When we apprehend something immediately, we also apprehend it abstractly, though we tend to believe the immediacy is **concrete**. Hegel shows that what we think of as the most immediate relationship that we have to the world is actually totally abstract. But all immediacy is really mediated. What the *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows is that there is no such thing as immediacy.

infinite / infinitude (unendlich / die Unendlichkeit) – what does not have an external restriction, as opposed to the externally restricted **finite**. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel distinguishes good infinity (gute Unendlichkeit), which restricts itself, and bad infinity (schlechte Unendlichkeit) which just goes on and on like an unending series of numbers. The subject is **infinite**, according to Hegel, because it has the capacity to limit itself. Kant was the first to discover this through his conception of the subject giving itself the moral law that restricts itself.

in-and-for-itself (in-und-für-sich) – something which has both a separate existence and exists as something reflected upon.

individual / Individuality (einzel / die Einzelheit) – the individual or singular is what results from the **universal** taking on a **particular** form. Individuality or singularity is how universality actualizes itself.

in-itself (in-sich) – that which has not been reflected upon. What seems to have its own separate existence and doesn't yet exist for a thinking consciousness.

intuition (die Anschauung) – this is a technical term that Hegel takes over from Kant. According to Kant, we receive sensory intuitions that are not yet conceptualized from our sense organ. In contrast, Hegel did not believe that we could have any pure intuitions that were not conceptualized. This is one of the key points of difference between Kant and Hegel.

mediation (die Vermittlung) – a conduit which connects one thing to another—usually a knower to what is known. If we know something mediately, we know it indirectly, through some sort of mediation. This is where we get the word "media." But for Hegel, all knowledge is necessarily mediated. There is no such thing as immediate knowledge or immediate experience because language and concepts mediate everything that we know and experience.

moment (das Moment) – one aspect of the whole, an aspect which has no separate existence from the whole and disappears within it.

natural consciousness (natürliche Bewusstsein) – thinking which has not yet reflected upon itself. A completely unreflective thinking which takes everything as it appears.

necessary / Necessity (notwendig / die Notwendigkeit) – following from something inherently, what cannot be otherwise. See **contingent**.

negation (negative / die Verneinung) – this is what drives philosophy forward. It exists as a necessary part of every positive being or statement, but it undermines this positivity.

Contradiction is the result of negation. It is negation that drives existence and thinking forward. Without the negative, there would be no reason to philosophize or even think at all. Thus, philosophy can't avoid the negative, but must “tarry” with it.

notion (der Begriff) – **concept**. Just a translator's unfortunate choice used in place of the word **concept**. When one sees “notion,” one should read “concept.” There is especially no warrant in Hegel's thought for ever capitalizing “Notion” and thereby exacerbating the mistranslation.

particular (die Besonderheit) – differentiation within the **universal**. We arrive at the particular through the universal, not in opposition to the universal. In this sense, particularity depends on the universality that determines it. Universality appears in a positive form through particularity. Without becoming particularized in some way or another, the universal cannot manifest itself in the world. To be actual, the universal acquire a particular form and becomes an individual or a specific thing. There is no such thing as an actual universal—only individuals or specific things.

phenomenology (die Phenomenologie) – an analysis of the subject's different modes of experience as its conceptual knowledge becomes increasingly concrete and in touch with the whole. Hegel's sense of “phenomenology” has almost nothing to do with the discipline that Edmund Husserl created around 1900 that goes by the same name. Husserl sees phenomenology as the analysis of experience itself as it is given to the subject.

picture thinking (Vorstellung) – the common translation for Hegel's term “Vorstellung,” which he uses to designate representational thought as opposed to conceptual thought. One could perhaps more correctly translate “Vorstellung” as “representation,” but most translators do not do this.

predicate (das Predikat) – an attribute of a subject. If I say “I have red hair,” then red hair would be a predicate of me as a subject. Before Hegel, certain philosophers thought that one knew a thing by listing all its different predicates. Bertrand Russell famously attacks Hegel for confusing statements of identity (“I am a professor at the University of Vermont”) with statements of predication (“I have red hair”). But Hegel's claim is that all statements of identity are ultimately statements of predication because we must first know what we are talking about in order to identify it. We discover **identity** not through accumulating predicates but seeing what the predicates fail to encompass. The identity of a thing how it fails to embody its predicates.

reason (die Vernunft) – universalizing thought. Thought which sees the connections which exist between the oppositions in the world creating by the **understanding** and its way of dividing up

what it thinks. Kant sees reason as leading us into irresolvable contradictions, which is why he sticks to the understanding. Hegel, in contrast, sees reason as a higher form of knowledge than the understanding precisely because it is able to grasp the actuality of contradictions in the world.

reflection (das Reflexion) – thinking back on thought itself. Through reflection, we recognize that what seems out there is really in here. We discover that what we imagined to be external is actually internal.

science (die Wissenschaft) – not restricted to the hard sciences as it is today, but a more general term meaning especially philosophical or speculative thinking.

self-consciousness (Selbst-Bewusstsein) – the agency which knows itself as the agency of knowledge. Self-consciousness emerges when consciousness reflects on its own role in constituting the objects that it experiences. Self-consciousness can only investigate itself through its relation to another self-consciousness because this otherness that is also sameness enables it to see what differences it makes in the world.

spirit (*Geist*) (also translated as mind) – humanity’s knowledge about itself that binds it together. Spirit is a collective knowledge that doesn’t just remain knowledge but also actualizes itself in the world. In this way, spirit is the driving force of human history. Spirit is driven forward by its own self-diremption and its encounter with the **negative**. In order to continue to actualize itself, spirit must tarry with the negative rather than repressing it or looking away. The collective spirit that animates humanity is also what Christianity calls the Holy Spirit. Hegel’s idea of spirit is indebted to this Christian idea.

speculation (die Spekulation) – thought that goes beyond what is given and thinks about the role that difference has in all identity. Speculative thought recognizes that contradictions are actual in the world and cannot ultimately be overcome. Hegel contrasts speculative thought with analytic thought, which rejects all contradiction as nonsensical.

subject (der Subjekt) – a being capable of becoming conscious of its own self-diremption or self-division. The subject can know and theorize its own self-contradiction, whereas all other beings simply succumb to contradiction when they die. For the subject, contradiction does not just remain external but becomes apparent as the internal force that drives knowing and action. The subject is the active force of knowing in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Subject is originally opposed to substance, but comes to know that substance must also be subject. If the external world of substance weren’t also subject and thus self-divided, then the subject of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* could never have emerged.

sublate / sublation (aufheben / die Aufhebung) – perhaps Hegel’s favorite word because it has three different meanings that all work together. It is an act of *cancelling* that *preserves* what has been cancelled as it *overcomes* it. To be sublated (or aufgehoben) is to be cancelled, preserved, and overcome.

substance (die Substanz) – what exists on its own independently, what has independent being.

Substance is originally the objective world counterposed to the **subject**, but because substance itself is split, it is not really separate from subject. Hegel's major claim is that substance doesn't exist apart from subject. All substance is also subject, as he says in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

true / truth (wahr / die Wahrheit) – objectivity. Truth is originally something distinct from the **self-certainty** of consciousness, but we come to see that they are the same. At that moment, subjectivity and objectivity come together and are reconciled.

unessential (unwesentlich) – what seems like it could be done without, in contrast to the essential. However, Hegel is constantly showing how what seems to be unessential is really what is essential.

universal / Universality (allgemein / die Allgemeinheit) – the basis for all thinking, what guides our apprehension of what we perceive and enables us to organize it. Universals are concepts that enable us to make sense of the world but that have no direct and present form in the world. The actualization of a universal through a particular form creates an individual. In this sense, the individual or the singular is the way that universality must manifest itself. See **individual** and **particular**.